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Senate passes graduation-requirement plan

LANSING — The Senate today approved legislation that puts Michigan at the forefront of efforts to create rigorous statewide high-school graduation requirements so young people leave school ready for the 21st century.

“Michigan’s jobs are requiring more knowledge and skills today than they did 30 years ago,” Hammerstrom said. “It is imperative that our children are prepared for tomorrow’s workforce.”

The legislation would require students to take four years, or equivalent credit, of English and math; three of science and social studies; and one year of an arts course as well as a health and physical-education course. Additionally, students would have to take biology, geometry and Algebra I and II, among other specific course requirements.

In one key difference from the House plan, senators backed a two-year foreign-language requirement that could be fulfilled anytime between kindergarten and graduation.

The Senate Education Committee logged almost 3,000 miles in travel to nine hearings across the state that included members of the Senate Education Committee and local lawmakers. At the hearings, lawmakers listened to more than 24 hours of testimony from more than 200 people. Hammerstrom attended the last hearing held in Milan on March 7.

“I was very impressed with those who shared their thoughts about the proposed graduation requirements,” Hammerstrom said. “The most convincing testimony came from the students themselves. They offered the committee and the other panel members a personal look into their own educations and the success they’ve achieved.”

After the state superintendent and State Board of Education proposed graduation requirements beyond the half year of civics class now required, state lawmakers immediately began giving the board’s proposal careful consideration.

“Preparing our children for a bright future means preparing them to compete in a national and global economy that is very different than anything we’ve known before,” said Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming. “We have worked hard in the Senate to listen to all sides on this issue and incorporate many ideas to improve upon Michigan’s high school curriculum.”

Lawmakers now will begin working out the differences between the Senate and House versions of the legislation.

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